



## The contribution of educationists to the promotion of the Olympic principles\*

by Ignace Heinrich

In approaching this subject, it seems to me necessary first of all to define what is meant by Olympism and the ways in which educationists can best contribute to its development.

Olympism is a doctrinal and philosophical concept which offers a way of liberating both body and spirit in complete harmony through physical exercise and competitive activity.

The Latin phrase : *citius, altius, fortius*—faster, higher, stronger—one of the themes of the Olympic Games, can be interpreted in a double sense :

1. that of man's equilibrium in which harmony, rhythm and personal ideals are sought through social integration,

2. that of excess in which everything is brought into play in order to achieve success at all costs, whether it be in the sports, political (Munich '72, Montreal '76) social or economic fields.

Instead of making a general definition of the educationist, I prefer to indicate the teaching problems that are encountered right from an early age. By defining the needs of children in relation to their growth, educationists will more readily understand in what way the Olympic principles can be applied.

The education of children develops under the influence of the family, followed by that of school, friends, books, television, and the general environment. After some years, the child must become an adjusted social being. Can there be a more complete way of self-knowledge than by learning through play ?

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What a rich field for the educationist to be able to guide the child and prompt him in his perpetual discovery by controlling and encouraging his driving force and emotions !

The technical developments of modern times engender a spirit of easy living. The mental concept of comfort leads to a glorification of the law of least effort.

Mechanisation, which tends to spare human exertion even in the elementary movement of walking, has ruined for many not only the joy of effort, but even the idea of it.

A human being can never be compared to a machine. There will always be a philosophy of life to bring out the creative side of man, an infinite power of development by means of thought and effort. In this respect Olympism offers one of the possible and efficient remedies against the machine.

Pierre de Coubertin predicted the failure of education methods, and revealed the virus that was eating into the social organisation of the modern world. The organisation of the Olympic Games has produced great enthusiasm and imposing results, but the search for eurhythmia in a harmonious combination of exertion and art has not achieved the results that had been hoped for. This "springtime" of universal youth which the renovator of Olympism described with passion rejected this glorification of beauty created by effort.

The idea of selection is inevitably one of the elements for entry into the Olympic Games. It does not in any way reduce the universality that they wish to encourage by developing personal and individual qualities for all and for the benefit of all.

This presupposes a very clear idea of the grading of such qualities.

Olympism is a matter of individual conscience, to do all one can, and to the best of one's ability. It is an act of confidence in the quality of efficiency. The proof that an individual gives of his qualities must produce in him both serenity and balance.

The pupil often wants to outstrip his teacher; the daily instruction often seems too simple and tedious. He wants to press forward.

Let us now see, through the development of the child, the contribution of educationists, viz. parents, teachers, physical education instructors, coaches, doctors and leaders.

## Maternal age : from 4 to 8

The child discovers both his play and himself. He wants to express himself. He imitates and copies movements and situations. He plays with a ball, jumps a rope, rides a bicycle.

The total availability of his body and spirit teaches him how to grow. He does not seek profound reasons so as to understand, but his senses and instincts show him the way to go in order to be able to act like an adult. He already wants to become part of older groups and be admitted to their circle.

To play at being master, father and mother, a soldier, to disguise himself or imitate sports exploits seen on television, are daily childish activities.

Such games should always remain a pleasure and not an obligation.

This is an apprenticeship for the freedom that later on will model the man or woman. It is up to the educationists, parents and teachers, therefore, to teach this game approach so as better to understand the adult world.

Manuals of games exist to provide information, but it is by practice and instruction above all that teachers should perfect their development.

## 8 to 12 years old

This is the age of initiation, an apprenticeship in competitive games using elementary rules.

The child wants to compare himself with other children, to show his prowess, to be the strongest, to jump the furthest and highest, to fight and wrestle.

He must be taught sports movements and above all their objective, in other words, their motivation. This is the commencement of a certain discipline.

He discovers the importance of teamwork and rhythm (hence the importance in this apprenticeship of music and dancing).

The child learns to overcome his immediate desires as shown by his increasing social awareness. Physical or physiological deficiency is often the cause of a child's inattention.

Are not all these principles a basis for the school of life and the Olympic idea ? In this sense, educationists should clearly see the limitations, motivations and needs of children.

Rivalry will increase their interest and alertness.

## 12 to 16 : the awkward age

The pre-adolescent boy (or girl), with the body in perpetual change, still hesitates between the desire to become an adult and of remaining a child. With a sudden burst, his size increases. He becomes aware that the gap that separates him from adulthood has narrowed. He wants to be "himself", with his own opinions, judgement and will.

This self-assertion with all its demands is annoying for those around him. Instability, doubts and demands in all fields make him discontented. The legendary clumsiness of the adolescent and his shyness arise without doubt from the fact that he has to get used to seeing the world surrounding him in a new light.

His attention is fixed upon his own body and its rapid development. He measures his height and weight which indicate to him his strength and power. Conscious of his physical and intellectual faults, he becomes awkward and desperate lest he will never be the strong adult of whom he dreams.

Pre-puberty is also above all the age of improvement. The boy (or girl) must compete, sometimes with his comrades and sometimes with adults.

He has acquired a good reasoning ability and is capable of understanding and checking the accuracy of his own points of view.

He accepts remarks about his bad habits fairly readily. He aspires to do well, and in the field of sport the justification of a correction does not give rise to criticism and argument. The wish to imitate the admired example of a champion, for example, has to be taken into consideration.

The boy (or girl) starts to learn the value of patience and of success by repetition and, thus, of sustained work.

Instructors in physical education must have the same patience in order to put up with his probing. They must face up to this attitude of continual criticism and question-

ing. They must prove that the control of the body and self-mastery are concrete ways of reaching the desired objective.

The widest range of sports should be offered. Oxygenation is of first importance. For this reason basic sports such as running and swimming should be given top priority in teaching.

The development of the lungs and heart is a factor of the greatest importance in giving vigour and stability to the body. It directly affects both character and psychology.

Efficiency will be more or less great according to the teaching methods.

In classes, homogenous groups should be formed, if possible according to interest. The encouragement and confidence that the teachers can inspire will play a part as equally effective as (if not greater than) the learning of technique.

## Adulthood

Adulthood starts at about 17. The man (or woman) shows this in his manifold desires, in sports success as in other fields. He is obliged to make a choice so as not to disperse his efforts. He becomes an individual. He learns how to control himself and, as a result, becomes more organised. Training becomes the secret of success. Self-mastery by flexibility, the development of breathing so as not to tire readily (together with the skill in expiration), economy of effort, should create a physical harmony.

All tensions and muscular over-development must be avoided as they can also affect the mind and to a certain extent harm the individual.

Over-extended training has given rise to suggestions that top competition sport is the cause of degradation, even debasement. Even if there may be exceptions which prove this rule, such ideas must be strongly opposed.

Why criticise the sportsman and not the musician or dancer who repeat the same movements and even the same note without end, in order to perfect their art ?

Through his search for speed and a personal rhythm, the sportsman perfects his technique and acquires his skill. Their perfect combination creates that artistic picture of beauty of movement and individual style.

## The coach

The coach must understand all these facts perfectly. Between him and his athletes there must be a deep-seated understanding so that their collaboration may become perfect. To educate young people who have little past experience, but who are all devoured with ambition and a desire to find their place in the sun, considerable psychology is needed. The part played by the will is essential and of prime importance.

"One cannot want what one does not know."

The acquiring of a certain amount of knowledge is indispensable if the objective is to be reached. This knowledge is complementary to the effort.

Perseverance, one of the bases of endurance, is also the secret of confidence and, at the same time, a remedy for discouragement.

The coach is in direct contact with the performers. He creates the atmosphere, he perfects, he coaches, he selects. He must possess a clear concept of progress, and know the best way in which to arrive the furthest without overdoing things.

He should be a good organiser, conscientious, sociable, inspiring, enthusiastic, and at the same time calm and assured, with authority, even to the point of inflexibility. He must be able to convey a sense of effort and competition, and create a spirit of rivalry.

## The doctor

Medicine has played an important role, not only in the control of health, but also in the preparation of the athlete. It has, consequently, an important part to play in education. The question might be asked : should sports medicine remain in its traditional role which is to care for and bring the athlete up to his best form at the required moment, and in the fittest condition, or should it by using recent chemical and toxicological discoveries look only to the performance itself as the supreme goal and at all costs ?

Here are two opposing concepts.

Sport is above all a training of the will, a way of showing certain physical and moral values. It is also a first-class remedy against the evil practices of modern life.

Medicine, and research workers in this field, have been able to improve training methods and adapt them to each performer according to his sport. This has allowed the athlete to expand to the full possession of his means. This is the natural and healthy way of any merit in honest competition.

An athlete who has been tampered with can beat a healthy athlete in a single competition. Such witchcraft in sport is cheating. Such scientific methods lead to the production of freaks, with brilliant results it is true, but is this not dangerous ?

It may be retorted that ever since the world began there have been champions, for a champion is someone who does something that others do not.

When a champion takes a step forward, the rest will do so later.

The problems posed by medicine within the framework of school sport and sport for all as well as in competitive sport, require all-round organisation.

Would it not be a good thing to establish a small sports medical booklet, a kind of sports passport for all children ? This booklet would follow the child continually. Medical checks would be recorded in it, and the precise criteria growing more and more extensive would guarantee the health of the child for competitive purposes. Would this not be an added incentive for taking a closer interest in his physical potential ?

## The leader

The leader is a responsible militant who should know his objective perfectly. He must create a mental attitude, a way of daily living. He commits himself for pleasure, interest and amusement and attains a certain repute. Whatever position he holds, the leader has an educational role to play. He must maintain the taste for physical exertion and an overall sense of balance. His devotion should set an example. He must impart that warmth which all those with similar interests share. His efficiency is shown by his enthusiasm in creating a warm comradeship and a fruitful friendship.

He creates the vital impulse which is the "oxygen" without which the others would become asphyxiated. He should be the restraining influence in moments of exaltation in victory. He must find words of

encouragement in the bitterness of defeat. Happiness and charm are means of social communication.

### The referee

The referee should be looked upon as the director of the game and not as a censor. He has a tremendous responsibility. Upon him frequently depends both the atmosphere and the satisfactory running of a match. He should thoroughly understand the rules of the game and apply them in the right spirit. Players feel instinctively with whom they have to deal from the very first decisions. The blow of a whistle penalising an infringement or intended infringement of the rules often has a greater effect than a great deal of talk. The players sense this authority and respect it.

For the good player this is an additional safeguard ; he is able to display his qualities better and concentrate fully. The bad player, feeling himself watched, cannot make use of his tricks, and has to learn to control himself.

According to the importance of the game, penalties or warnings can be justified by an appropriate word. Even during the most serious upset, the referee should be capable of restoring calm by his authority and his clear-sightedness in following the situation closely.

His impartiality is a surety for the correct and good behaviour of the teams.

The education of the crowd at a sports event in respecting the rules of the game and the opponents, is also to a large extent the responsibility of the referee.

It is an apprenticeship in democratic values.

### The champion

To reach the rank of a champion is to set the seal upon the sum total of the effort made, the self-denial, and even the asceticism. It is the fruit of a long apprenticeship in total self-assertion.

To the young, a champion is an idol. He sets an example. Unfortunately he is forgiven nothing. His least actions are exploited, and the young who watch him on television seek to imitate him. His statements must go beyond the sporting context. He must be able to explain all the means that he has

called upon and how he has been able to overcome all the worries. His simplicity influences as much as his exploits.

During the whole of his career, he should be trained to face up to all the problems associated with this responsibility. He should embody, fully and effectively, the true meaning of sport.

So that he can freely assert himself and extend himself to his full capacity, his social future should not be mortgaged. High level sport is veering towards a bad path. It is gradually breaking free from the officials and governing bodies of sport. Dealers in spectacles and sponsors are trying to corner it. The deviation of a few national and international leaders in the political and financial world has put the Olympic Games in jeopardy and has betrayed the Olympic ideal.

The Olympic Games should be the consecration of the top level champion. Without the Olympic Games Olympism will no longer be talked about, for one cannot praise a failure. For all these reasons, the integrity and nobility of humanity, the final goal of each being, must continually be manifested in sport.

### The journalist

This role falls mainly on the press, radio and television journalist. Does his function stop short at giving information ? And here lies a big problem.

Should journalists educate or merely inform the mass media ?

Opinion is very divided as a recent discussion among journalists showed. The sensational press is more ready to pull sport to pieces than to praise its merits. It is a pity that the fundamental philosophy of the mastery of the body is not better understood and exploited by them. This would lay the foundation for a new life style.

The social and cultural aspects of sport are hardly broached by the journalists of television and radio. The promotion of sport and physical education as an essential complement to the social development of mankind is only broached on tip-toe.

Fair play, the very essence of sport, is a forsaken idea. It is less profitable, in other words, less attractive, than criticism or controversy.

To know the best way to calm the reactions of a chauvinistic crowd resulting from a manifestly partial decision seems unimportant when considered in terms of the sensational.

News or re-broadcasts dealing with national or international sport are only put out as a means of entertainment.

Television to some extent recognises the importance of technique by accentuating the power and virtue of such technique as the major criterion of advancement.

Sometimes attention is drawn to the initiation of some sports in the same way that people are encouraged to practice recreational sport in some countries. But only sport as a spectacle draws a large audience and holds the interest of those who present it. Sports that are less popular are undervalued.

Perhaps the co-operation of those responsible for sport and the journalists is insufficient.

Perhaps the sportsman is not conversant with the technical side of Information.

May I make a suggestion to the IOA ?

Could it not organise a world festival on television to which each country would send its best coverage of training and education in sport ? The best films could be broadcast by world television authorities.

Skill, that is to say, the understanding of the body can cure boredom and is a passion no less than that of the culture of the spirit.

To master one's physical strength leads to feelings of exaltation and well-being.

May educationists, understand the grandeur of this conception and seek to teach the value of such training !

May sport give an assurance to the young, victims of restlessness and left to their own devices, may it help them along the road to assurance by revealing and opening up a wide horizon to the opportunities of perfecting their moral well-being.

Olympism can be a kind of moral church.

*I.H.*

